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ABSTRACT

Almost unnoticed, growing numbers of working poor people are entering politics at the community level in dozens of major cities in Texas and across the United States. These people are unusual because they view politics as a long-term process to build relationships, new institutions, and humane communities. This book tells the story of a new kind of intervention in politics, in which poor people incorporate their religious values into a struggle for power and visibility. They are sparked by people like Ernesto Cortes, Jr., an extraordinary community organizer who is engaged in the empowerment of people at the neighborhood and parish level through leadership training, network building, and a form of popular education. Cortes and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) network of community organizations have become successful enough to transform the politics of San Antonio and influence the fate of specific Texas statewide issues. Moreover, local IAF groups across the nation are virtually the only organizations in America that are enticing working poor people to participate in politics. Chapters in the book are anecdotal, covering episodes in Cortes' life; the history of the IAF; and San Antonio, Chicago, and Los Angeles politics from 1964 to 1990, primarily in the 1980s. They demonstrate the role of local churches and personal faith in community organization and the struggle for social justice, the interpersonal and experiential strategies used in IAF training programs for church leaders and community activists, and the importance of "relational" power that grows out of the mutual accountability of members of local organizations. Contains references, chapter notes, and an index. (SV)

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